

THE BUSINESS, TECHNOLOGY & ART OF ANIMATION AND VFX

May
2020

ANIMATIONTM MAGAZINE

fyc |  tv+



fyc |  tv+

CENTRAL PARK



THE BUSINESS, TECHNOLOGY & ART OF ANIMATION AND VFX

May
2020

ANIMATIONTM MAGAZINE

**Songs in the Key of
Central Park:
Loren Bouchard and
Josh Gad on Their
Exuberant New
Apple TV+ Toon**

Scoob!
**Tony Cervone's
Charming Take
on the Beloved
Great Dane**

**Penn Ward and
Duncan Trussell
Preach Their
Midnight Gospel**

**Looney Tunes
Cartoons Hops
Aboard HBO Max**

\$7.95 U.S.



w w w . a n i m a t i o n m a g a z i n e . n e t

A FAMILY STORY FOR ANYONE WHO EVER
WANTED TO GET AWAY FROM THEIR FAMILY



The Willoughbys

APRIL 22 | NETFLIX

PG
PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED
SOME MATERIAL MAY BE INAPPROPRIATE FOR CHILDREN
UNDER 13 YEARS OF AGE

THE BUSINESS, TECHNOLOGY & ART OF ANIMATION AND VFX

May
2020

ANIMATIONTM

MAGAZINE

What's Up, Bugs?
Looney Tunes Cartoons
Hops Aboard HBO Max

**Penn Ward and
Duncan Trussell
Preach Their
Midnight Gospel**

Scoob!
Tony Cervone's
Charming Take on the
Beloved Great Dane

\$7.95 U.S.



Songs in the Key of Central Park:
Loren Bouchard and Josh Gad on Their
Exuberant New Apple TV+ Toon

w w w . a n i m a t i o n m a g a z i n e . n e t

A FAMILY STORY FOR ANYONE WHO EVER
WANTED TO GET AWAY FROM THEIR FAMILY



The Willoughbys

APRIL 22 | NETFLIX

PG
PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED
SOME MATERIAL MAY BE INAPPROPRIATE FOR CHILDREN
UNDER 10 YEARS OF AGE



8



16



20

Frame-By-Frame

6 Discovering Miyazaki's Attention to Details
An excerpt from *Sharing the House with the Never-Ending Man*.

By Steve Alpert

Features

8 The Case of the Loveable Great Dane
Doo gets his due in Warner Bros.' eagerly anticipated pic *Scoob!*

By Michael Mallory

12 Your 'Everything-Will-Change' Animated Movie Guide

The 2020 feature film release calendar has become one of the many casualties of COVID-19, but the diverse titles awaiting release around the world give us hope for the post-pandemic world.

Cover A: Warner Bros' *Scoob!* offers a new CG-animated take on the popular pooch introduced in 1969.

Cover B: Warner Bros. Animation's ambitious *Looney Tunes Cartoons* premieres on HBO Max in May.

Television/Streaming

16 A Musical Tonic for Trying Times
Loren Bouchard and Josh Gad tell us a few things about *Central Park*, their wonderful new musical show on Apple TV+.

By Ramin Zahed

20 Wendezvous with That Wascally Wabbit (and Friends)

The long-anticipated new *Looney Tunes Cartoons* series arrives on HBO Max in May!

22 Light at the End of the Apocalypse
Pendleton Ward and Duncan Trussell shine a beam of optimism and humanity in their brilliant new animated series *The Midnight Gospel*.

24 Extra Wild Extra-Terrestrials
Co-creators Justin Roiland and Mike McMahon offer some insights into the making of their twisted, hilarious new Hulu show *Solar Opposites*.

26 Happy Endings of the Twisted Kind
JJ Villard tells us everything we needed to know about his insane new *Fairy Tales* show on Adult Swim.

VFX

28 Make It So ... Great!
The new spinoff series *Star Trek: Picard* relied on the expertise of VFX supe Jason Zimmerman and his team for some stunning sci-fi visuals.

By Trevor Hogg

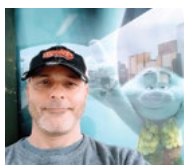
Anime

30 Tales of a Middle School Gumshoe
Funimation clues fans in to *Rampo Kitan: Game of Laplace*, from Lerche studio.

By Charles Solomon

Day in the Life

31 We visit **Marc du Pontavice** and his talented team at Paris-based Xilam Animation.



Making Toons in the Time of Corona

How are you holding up? Do you have sanitizer spray in the house? Don't you love making DIY masks? How many loaves of bread can you make and eat in one week? Yes, this is our new reality during this COVID-19 era spring. While there's no denying the tragedy we are witnessing every day, let's not forget to be grateful for what we have in our lives and for the bravery and heroism of those who are fighting daily battles in emergency rooms and hospitals all over the world.

Over the past month, we've heard from many animation professionals who read our magazine and website in different countries around the planet, and they've been telling us how they have kept their studios and projects going despite all the shutdown challenges and difficulties. It has been quite inspiring to hear their stories and discover how the creative community is giving back by offering free downloads and fun and educational fare for kids stuck at home. At a time when it is impossible to move forward with live-action shoots and productions, animation has come to the rescue, allowing artists, writers and voice-over talent to work from the comfort of their homes. And now, you can even add your favorite backgrounds from *Rick and Morty*, *Bob's Burgers* and *Onward* to entertain your colleagues during those long Zoom meetings where everyone seems to talk at once.

We have been posting some of the timely reports about how the animation and VFX community has adapted the new normal online every day. We are also providing regular updates on how some of our favorite events and confabs are planning online versions instead of the live events. We all know that watching animated shorts or video chats alone in our living rooms is not the same as experiencing a wonderful new project with thousands of fans and professionals in a packed auditorium or under the stars at Annecy. But one of the better qualities of being human is our ability to adapt to change and to seek the light at the end of the tunnel.

We hope you enjoy the feature stories we have collected in these pages. When we were planning this issue, Warner Bros. was hoping to release *Scoob!* in cinemas around the world -- but of course, things have changed and all the theaters have closed down. So maybe we'll see this charming movie on the big screen later this year, when things are closer to normal. Or maybe, the Great Dane will have his big close-up online at home, just like DreamWorks' *Trolls World Tour* did in April. Either way, we think you'll enjoy Michael Mallory's lovely interview with director Tony Cervone and the team that made it all happen.

This month is especially rich with creative-driven animated projects such as *Central Park* on Apple TV+, *The Midnight Gospel* on Netflix, *Looney Tunes Cartoons* on HBO Max, *Solar Opposites* on Hulu and *JJ Villard's Fairy Tales* on Adult Swim. Toilet paper may be scarce, but there is an abundance of inspired, wildly imaginative shows being made, and that is a silver lining we can all be happy about.

Finally, remember to be safe, wear your masks and keep your social distance. Try to focus on better days ahead, when this pandemic will be just a bad memory. Then, we can all go back to smiling and hugging each other when we meet at our favorite animation events around the



Pee-wee's Playhouse Zoom background

Ramin

Ramin Zahed
Editor in Chief
ramin@animationmagazine.net

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"Zoom is a word in my first 50 years that I've used maybe twice. But in the last seven days, I've used it 4,000 times. It's been hugely helpful. It's comforting to see familiar faces and work on more mundane things."

— *Family Guy* co-showrunner Rich Appel in *The Hollywood Reporter*



ANIMATION MAGAZINE

May 2020

Vol. 34, Issue 5, No. 300

Info@animationmagazine.net

President and Publisher: Jean Thoren

Accounting: Jan Bayouth

EDITORIAL

edit@animationmagazine.net

Editor in Chief: Ramin Zahed

Multimedia Editor: Mercedes Milligan

Webmaster: Steven Dietrich

Asst. Webmaster: Matthew Keable

Tech Reviews Editor: Todd Sheridan Perry

Contributors: Steve Alpert, Trevor Hogg,
Michael Mallory, Charles Solomon

ADVERTISING SALES

sales@animationmagazine.net

Sheri Shelton

EVENTS

Director: Kim Derevlany

kim@animationmagazine.net

CREATIVE

prod@animationmagazine.net

Art Director/Production Manager:

Susanne Rector

CIRCULATION

circ@animationmagazine.net

Circulation Director:

Jan Bayouth

TO ADVERTISE:

Phone: 818-883-2884

Fax: 818-883-3773

Email: sales@animationmagazine.net

Website: www.animationmagazine.net

List Rental

Quantum List Marketing

(480) 860-6036

ANIMATION MAGAZINE

(USPS 015-877/ISSN 1041-617X)

Published monthly except for combined issues of June/July
September/October, by Animation Magazine

24943 Kit Carson Road

Calabasas, CA 91302

Periodicals postage paid at Woodland Hills Post Office CA,
And additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER:

SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO MAILING ADDRESS:

ANIMATION MAGAZINE

26500 W. Agoura Rd. Ste. 102-651

Calabasas, CA 91302

TO SUBSCRIBE:

For the U.S., the rate is \$60 for 1 year or \$95 for 2 years.

Rates for Canada and Mexico are US\$75 for 1 year or US\$120 for 2 years delivered by foreign airmail. Foreign rates are US\$90 for 1 year or US\$145 for 2 years delivered by foreign airmail.

Please allow six to eight weeks for initial delivery.

Also available in a digital version for \$36 for 1 year or \$60 for 2 years.

Animation Magazine

© 2020 Animation Magazine

Prior written approval must be obtained to duplicate any and all contents.

The copyrights and trademarks of images featured herein are the property of their respective owners.

Animation Magazine acknowledges the creators and copyright holders of the materials mentioned herein, and does not seek to infringe on those rights.



www.gaumont.us | [@GaumontTv](https://twitter.com/GaumontTv) | laura.laas@gaumont.com

© 2019 Gaumont Animation. All Rights Reserved. - With the support of the PROCIREP-Société des Producteurs and of the ANGOA.





Discovering Miyazaki's Attention to Details

By Steve Alpert

The following is an excerpt from the memoir *Sharing the House with the Never-Ending Man* by Studio Ghibli's head of international sales, Steve Alpert. (Stone Bridge Press, \$19.95)

In my quest to learn how animated feature films were made, I had the opportunity to study the animators at work drawing, the background artists preparing the sumptuous watercolor backgrounds, the cinematographers turning the drawings into cels, and the color specialists choosing the colors and painting the cels. The first post-production process I got to see was voice recording. Unlike most animation studios, Ghibli would complete the animation first and add the voices later. This is called after-recording, as opposed to pre-recording. Hayao Miyazaki and many of the senior animators at Ghibli whom he trained, had an amazing sense of timing. They could imagine a line of dialogue and then capture not only the exact mouth movements it would take to deliver that line, but the timing of each mouth position on screen.

This made things more difficult for the voice actor. He or she would have to strike exactly the right tone and create the right mood or attitude in speaking each line of dialogue while also exactly matching the mouth movements of his or her character as they would appear on a large-format screen in a movie theater. They would also have to say their lines clearly and precisely enough to satisfy the most sophisticated audiophile viewing the film using the most sophisticated state-of-the-art audio equipment.

There was also a fairly long wait between each of the repetitions. After the actor says a line, he/she has to wait while the recording technicians examine every quarter second of the recorded line on a graphic display. The process has been speeded up over the years by the use of computers, but when *Princess Mononoke* was recorded the recording process was still largely manual.

I once watched a sequence over and over again where San charges into the Tataraba fortress, leaps up onto the roof and speeds across it. Then Ashitaka leaps up and goes after her. What I noticed after

seeing this again and again was how the tiles on the rooftop react to being stepped on, first by the light and lithe San, barely registering the weight of her compact body and small feet, and then by the heavier and less graceful Ashitaka. Just by how the rooftop registers the tread of their feet, you have a sense of the weight, mass, velocity and physical force exerted by each character.

What I also noticed in the sequence was that when Ashitaka jumps up onto the roof, he causes a few of the tiles at the edge of the roof to crumble. Pieces of them fall to the ground. With my

not meeting its production deadlines. In a larger studio (a Hollywood studio), the film's producer would probably have told the director that it's a very nice touch and yes it would be great to do this but we don't have the time or budget for it and it won't make that much differ-

'At Studio Ghibli the director and the producer were of one mind about the quality of the film (usually). Budget would not be a reason to override an artistic decision (usually). And if Suzuki felt that he had to override any decision that Miyazaki made on a film, he would have to do it with guile and deception and not by fiat.'



Steve Alpert



newly gained knowledge of animation, I realized that what was unusual about this is that the roof is a part of the background and not something that normally moves in animation. *Princess Mononoke* was the last major feature-length animated film to be drawn by hand and animated on hand-painted cels. In hand-painted cel animation, the moving pieces are done in a somewhat simplified style that allows them to be more easily replicated and manipulated. But the elaborate backgrounds on which they move are too detailed, too intricate, and too finely done to be manipulated (animated) in that way. Also, they are done in watercolor and not pencil.

In other words, in order to get those few pieces of rooftop tile to crack and crumble to the ground, Miyazaki would have had to get an animator to specially create elaborate hand-painted cels to match the background image and to painstakingly recreate them in enough versions of crumbling to make the effect work. This sequence lasted on screen for perhaps only a few seconds or less. But it would have taken a large chunk of someone's time (and therefore money) to create. This on a project that was already precariously in danger of

ence to the film so, sorry, no, it's out. Not at Ghibli.

This is no doubt one very large difference between filmmaking in Japan and filmmaking almost everywhere else, the U.S. in particular. In America, the film belongs to the producer. He/she has the final say. In Japan, the film belongs to the director. The director has the final word. At Studio Ghibli the director and the producer were of one mind about the quality of the film (usually). Budget would not be a reason to override an artistic decision (usually). And if [Toshio] Suzuki felt that he had to override any decision that Miyazaki made on a film, he would have to do it with guile and deception and not by fiat.

I asked Miyazaki about that sequence in *Princess Mononoke*. I wondered why, since it was such a relatively large job for just a few instants of effect, and since it happened so fast and in a place when the audience's focus was on the action of the scene, wouldn't it be true that most viewers would not even notice it?

"You don't think you notice it," he said. "You may not be aware of it consciously, but you feel it. You feel it though you're not aware that you feel it, and it does make a difference." ♦



100% WOLF

LEGEND OF THE MOONSTONE

26 × 22'



65 × 22'
2 SEASONS



104 × 23'
4 SEASONS

WHERE THE ENTERTAINMENT IS



distribution@studio100media.com | www.studio100group.com

The Case of the Loveable Great Dane



Doo gets his due in Warner Bros.' eagerly anticipated pic *Scoob!*
By Michael Mallory

In his later years, Joseph Barbera was asked why he thought the gangly, goofy Great Dane Scooby-Doo was the most popular, tensile and enduring character to emerge from the hundreds he and William Hanna jointly fostered. Barbera responded, "If we knew that, we would have done it every time!"

Whatever magical appeal the Doo was born with, he maintains it in Warner Bros.' new animated film *Scoob!*, a mystery/sci-fi/action adventure that is the first fully-animated feature featuring Scooby and the gang. Produced by Warner Animation Group with animation production from Dallas- and Montre-



al-based Reel FX Animation, *Scoob!* reboots the 50-year-old franchise to show how lonely young

Shaggy Rogers (voiced as an adult ... or as close as Shaggy gets ... by Will Forte) and the hungry stray pup who would become his best bud first meet. It recounts how the two were befriended on a Halloween night by Fred (Zac Efron), Daphne (Amanda Seyfried) and Velma (Gina Rodriguez). As he has done for the past two decades, the ubiquitous Frank Welker voices Scooby-Doo.

From there, the

film depicts the trials and tribulations of trying to get Mystery, Inc. off the ground ... literally, as it turns out, given the involvement of the Blue Falcon (Mark Wahlberg) and Dynomutt (Ken Jeong) on board the Falcon Fury, their sleek, ultra-high tech spaceship. The gang also encounters Dick Dastardly (Jason Isaacs) and Muttley in their updated flying machine, a chugging, smoking, jury-rigged contraption from which the dirty duo threaten the world by striving to revive Cerberus, the hound of Hades. Captain Caveman (Tracy Morgan) is also along for the ride, as is a revamped version of his 1970s Teen Angel, Dee Dee Sykes (Kiersey Clemons), who now pilots the Falcon Fury.

A Cast of Many Toons

With a combined cast that represents the gamut of animation styles from the ultra-cartoon Captain Caveman and Scooby to the comic-book realistic Blue Falcon, developing a



Puppy Days: Audiences will learn about the origins of Scooby and Shaggy's friendship in the new feature. The CG animated adventure features Zac Efron, Amanda Seyfried, Gina Rodriguez, Will Forte and Frank Welker as the voices of Fred, Daphne, Velma, Shaggy and Scooby.



uniform visual look was all but impossible. "At first there was an effort to try and figure out one style for this movie but there was no happy medium," says director Tony Cervone, who specializes in new projects involving classic Looney Tunes and HB characters. "I think we were overdoing it. All these characters were in *Laff-A-Lympics* [from 1977-78] and it didn't bother anybody then, so we are true to the spirit of Hanna-Barbera."

Where differences between the three character sets do occur is in the color palettes and visual stylings. "Our movie is like three different movies in one," says production designer Michael Kurinsky. "I gave each major group its own palette and used those when that character was in control of a scene. The Falcon aesthetic is royal blue and clean white, almost like an Apple store. With Dastardly, everything is dieselpunk and dirty. For the gang's palette I based certain things off of the Mystery Machine's colors — teal blue and yellow/green,

with orange flowers — because those are so iconic."

One aspect of the film that unifies not only the three worlds represented but the entirety of Hanna-Barbera are scores of background gags and Easter eggs — more than a hundred according to producer Pam Coats. These not only reference those who were vital in the creation of Scoob and the gang in 1969 — writers Joe Ruby and Ken Spears, and designer Iwao Takamoto among them — but other classic shows as well. Sharp-eyed viewers will find Peebles' Pet Store in a cityscape and might even spot Top Cat and his gang in alleyway graffiti. While Southern California neighborhoods, particularly Venice Beach, which is where Shag and Scoob first meet, are replicated with total fidelity, one sequence proved more challenging for Kurinsky: Captain Caveman's island. "It's a subterranean, Middle-earth kind of world, and we wanted it to look prehistoric, but not like it was from an alien planet,"



Tony Cervone

he says. "That was tough, finding the right balance." In this instance Kurinsky wasn't able to rely on Google Earth the way he did to recreate various SoCal neighborhoods.

Captain Caveman himself was redesigned beyond his original hairy-eggplant-with-limbs look. "We came up with the idea that his 'fur' is

Visitors from the Vault: Classic Hanna-Barbera fans will recognize familiar faces including Blue Falcon (pictured), Dynomutt, Dick Dastardly, Muttley, Captain Caveman and Dee Dee.



very matted dreadlocks," Kurinsky notes. Similarly, the character of Dick Dastardly was rethought for the film; while still looking like a classic villain from a melodrama, he's been humanized. "He's a bad guy and he does some bad things," says Cervone, "but he's also kind of emotional. His feelings for Muttley are surprising but accurate." As for Muttley, Kurinsky promises he's completely true to the original; slightly redesigned for 3D rendering but still an upright dog (in relation to posture, not morally).

Cartoony Connection

Working closely with animation supervisor Bill Haller and the team at Reel FX (which had previously animated Warner's 3D Looney Tunes shorts), Cervone says both diligence and modern animation tools were used to faithfully translate the 2D Doo to cartoony 3D. "Just a slight turn of Scooby's head put him off model," the director says. "We used a tool called Sync-Sketch which let me draw over the main poses and push them back into where Scooby-Doo lives. This was a great tool because the animators were able to take that

draw-over and use it as a guide and inspiration."

Cervone goes on to say the spir-its of such past 2D masters as Milt Kahl, Chuck Jones, Tex Avery and Richard Williams inspired the animation, while a new system was developed to replicate classic tooning. "You know in *Tom and Jerry* [shorts] or Tex Avery when they would take two keys and in-between them, and then on the exposure sheet stagger the drawings so the characters would stretch and vibrate after reacting?" he asks. "We made an 'Avery Code' to do that in 3D."

Over the course of the five years *Scoob!* was in development and production, a number of other classic HB characters were considered for inclusion, notably Grape Ape, Atom Ant and Jabberjaw. They were ultimately dropped. "We only had a 90-minute movie," Cervone says, but he adds that the studio has "a good head start" on them *just in case* there's a sequel. ♦

Originally set for May 15, Warner Bros. may release *Scoob!* on VOD or later this year in theaters.

Still Scooby after All These Years

Voice actor Frank Welker was just beginning his professional career in 1969 when he landed the role of preppie teen crime solver Fred Jones in the original *Scooby-Doo, Where Are You!* Since then, he's been heard in more than 60 Scooby-related shows, films and games, as well as hundreds of other projects. In *Scoob!*, Welker plays the title character, which he's owned since 2002, while relinquishing the part of adult Fred to Zac Efron. "I think Zac was the perfect choice," Welker says. "He has great acting chops, super performing background, and in real life we look almost identical!"



Frank Welker

When first seen in the film, Scooby-Doo is a young stray pup living by his wits, though his voice remains familiar. "We fooled around with a young-sounding Scooby and even thought about having a young actor play him," says Welker, "but changing Scooby just didn't sound right. It was much too weird."

After all this time Welker still loves voicing the role. "It makes me feel happy and good all over," he says. "I can't wait to slip into that body and mind. I thank goodness for the fans and for those meddling kids!" ♦



EARN YOUR ANIMATION MASTER'S DEGREE!

36-Credit M.A., 60-Credit M.F.A.

Concentrations:

3D Character Animation, Video Games, Visual Effects

B.A./M.A. and B.A./M.F.A. degrees are also available

Fairleigh Dickinson University School of the Arts

285 Madison Ave., Madison, NJ 07940, 973-443-8693, robinb@fdu.edu

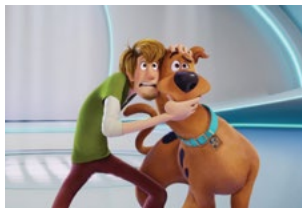
fdu.edu/animation

Your 'Everything-Will-Change' Animated Movie Guide

As we all know, the 2020 feature film release calendar has become one of the many casualties of the COVID-19 pandemic around the world. However, we have a long-running tradition of offering a comprehensive list of all the animated movies scheduled for release in the next few years in our May issue. Since it's always interesting to learn what studios have coming up in their pipelines, we decided to continue this tradition anyway. Many of the release dates are subject to change, and will be dependent on whether the studios will decide to debut the films online or in theaters once they reopen later this year (fingers crossed). You can also find a more complete, up-to-date version of this list on our website. Enjoy!

2020

Scoob! Animation veteran Tony Cervone directs this fresh new take on Hanna-Barbera's popular Scooby-Doo character. With Frank Welker, Zac Efron, Gina Rodriguez, Will Forte, Amanda Seyfried, Tracy Morgan, Ken Jeong, Kiersey Clemmons, Mark Wahlberg and Jason Isaacs. **Reel FX/Warner Animation Group (Late Spring)**



Soul. Pete Docter (*Monsters, Inc.*; *Up*, *Inside Out*) directs this new Pixar pic about a middle school music teacher whose soul is accidentally separated from his body and is transported to a center where souls develop and gain passions before being sent to newborn children. Featuring the voices of Jamie Foxx, Tina Fey, Questlove, Phylicia Rashad, Daveed Diggs and Angela Bassett. **Disney/Pixar (Nov. 20)**



The SpongeBob Movie: Sponge on the Run. We learn about SpongeBob's formative years in this CG-animated spin on the Frank Capra classic, directed by Tim Hill and featuring the voices of Tom Kenny, Bill Fagerbakke, Rodger Bumpass, Clancy Brown, Mr. Lawrence, Jill Talley, Carolyn Lawrence, Awkwafina, Reggie Watts, Keanu Reeves and Snoop Dogg! **Paramount/Nickelodeon Movies/Mikros Image (July 31)**



Over the Moon. Disney veteran animator Glen Keane is at the helm of this stylish CG-animated movie, which tells the story of a young girl who builds a rocket ship and travels to the moon to meet a legendary Moon Goddess. Animation director is Sacha Kapijimpanga, producer is John Kreidman. Written by the late Audrey Wells (*Under the Tuscan Sun*). With Irene Tsu. **Pearl Studios/Sony Pictures Imageworks/Netflix (Fourth Quarter)**



Connected. Produced by Chris Miller and Phil Lord and directed by Gravity Falls creative director Mike Rianda, this original movie follows a typical suburban family as they face a global takeover by hostile computers. Features the voices of Maya Rudolph, Danny McBride, Oliva Colman, Abbi Jacobson and Eric Andre. Co-directed by Jeff Rowe. (Former title: *The Mitchells vs. the Machines*). **Sony Pictures Animation (Sept. 18)**



Wolfwalkers. Directed by Tomm Moore (*Song of the Sea*, *The Secret of Kells*) and Ross Stewart (*Secret of Kells* art director), this charming and innovative 2D entry follows the adventures of a young apprentice hunter who comes to Ireland to help her father get rid of the wolves. But when Robyn saves a wild native girl, their friendship leads her to discover the world of the Wolfwalkers. With Sean Bean and Honor Kneafsey. **Cartoon Saloon/Melusine/Apple TV+ (Fourth Quarter)**



The Croods 2. DreamWorks' popular prehistoric family faces new challenges in this sequel directed by Joel Crawford, which focuses on their life after leaving the cave. Voice cast includes Peter Dinklage, Leslie Mann, Nicolas Cage, Emma Stone, Ryan Reynolds, Clark Duke, Catherine Keener and Cloris Leachman. **DreamWorks Animation/Universal (Dec. 23)**

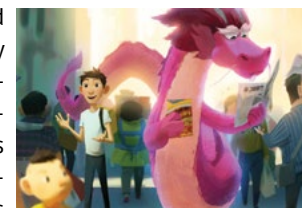
Tom and Jerry. Tim Story (*Ride Along 2*, *Shaft*) directs this live-action/CG-animated hybrid take on the classic cat and mouse characters, which were created 80 years ago by William Hanna and Joseph Barbera and best known for their 161 MGM shorts. The movie will focus on how the two characters met for the first time and stars Chloë Grace Moretz, Michael Peña, Ken Jeong, Rob Delaney, Pallavi Sharda, Colin Jost and Brian Stepanek. **Warner Animation Group (Dec. 23)**

Lupin the 3rd: The First. Written and directed by Takashi Yamazaki, this is the first CG-animated feature adaptation of the popular Monkey Punch manga series (first introduced in 1967), in which Arsene Lupin III teams up with a woman named Letizia to steal the Bresson Diary, a treasure that even the first Lupin could not get his hands on. **TMS Entertainment/Marza Animation Planet/Toho/GKIDS (TBA)**

Marona's Fantastic Tale. Romanian director Anca Damian's widely acclaimed and beautifully animated feature follows the trials and tribulations of a mixed-breed dog and her many human encounters. Features stunning production design by Brecht Evens, Sarah Mazzetti and Gina Thorstensen. **Aparte Films/Sacrebleu Productions/Minds Meet/GKIDS (TBA)**



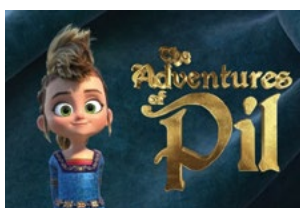
Wish Dragon. Written and directed by Chris Applehans, this modern-day fairy tale centers on the moral challenges that emerge from the encounter between a young boy and dragon who is able to make his wishes come true. Jackie Chan, who is producing the movie, is also providing the voice of Pipa God. With Constance Wu, John Cho, Will Yun Lee, Jimmy Wong and Bobby Lee. **Sony Pictures Animation/Base FX/Flagship Ent. Group (TBA)**



2021

The Addams Family 2. Directors Greg Tiernan and Conrad Vernon (*Sausage Party*) return to direct this sequel to their 2019 CG-animated take on Chaz Addams' loveable and macabre family unit. **Bron Studios/Cinesite/MGM/United Artists.**

The Adventures of Pil. Directed by Julien Fournet (*Jungle Bunch 2*), this CG-animated family feature centers on a resourceful young vagabond named Pil who disguises herself as a princess and finds herself saving Roland, the heir to throne, with the aid of the big, clumsy guard Crobar and the young jester Rigolin. **TAT Productions/France 3 Cinema/SND Films**



The Bad Guys. Mr. Wolf, Mr. Snake, Mr. Piranha, Mr. Shark and Ms. Tarantula hatch a plot to pull off the ultimate heist in this adaptation of Aussie children's author Aaron Blabey's best-selling book. The pic is directed by Pierre Perifel (*Bilby*) and written by Etan Cohen (*Tropic Thunder*) and Hilary Winston (*Community*, *My Name Is Earl*). Damon Ross and Rebecca Huntley are producers. **DreamWorks Animation/Universal**

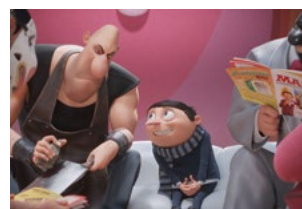
Bob's Burgers: The Movie. Loren Bouchard's popular FOX-TV family will make their feature debut in this musical comedy, which involves Louise and her nightlight Kuchi Kopi. According to Bouchard, the film will scratch every itch the fans of the series have ever had, "but it also has to work for all the good people who've never seen the show." Voice cast includes H. Jon Benjamin, Dan Mintz, Eugene Mirman, Larry Murphy, John Roberts and Kristen Schaal. **Bento Box Ent./20th Century Studios**

The Boss Baby 2. Tom McGrath is back at the helm of this sequel to DreamWorks' popular movie about the little business-minded tyke, loosely based on Marla Frazee's children's book. Alec Baldwin will once again provide the voice of the little terror. **DreamWorks Animation/Universal**

Hotel Transylvania 4. Count Dracula (voiced by Adam Sandler), his daughter Mavis (Selena Gomez) and regular human son-in-law Jonathan (Andy Samberg) continue their wild and wacky adventures in this fourth outing for the popular animated monster clan, which is expected to be a holiday release. **Sony Pictures Animation**

Luck. The debut film from Skydance Animation is described as a comedy that pulls back the curtain on the millennia-old battle between the organizations of good luck and bad luck that secretly affects our daily lives. Directed by Peggy Holmes (*Kung Fu Panda 3*), who replaced Alessandro Carloni. **Skydance Animation/Illion/Paramount**

Minions: The Rise of Gru. The plotline of this much-anticipated prequel centers on the origins of evil mastermind Gru (Steve Carell), which is directed by Kyle Balda and co-directors Brad Ableson and Jonathan del Val. Although the movie was originally scheduled for 2020, production at Illumination Mac Guff in Paris is delayed due to France's COVID-19 lockdown. The amazing voice cast includes Alan Arkin, Julie Andrews, Jean-Claude Van Damme, Taraji P. Henson, Danny Trejo, Lucy Lawless, Michelle Yeoh and Russell Brand! **Universal/Illumination (July 2)**



My Friend Finn. This CG-animated family comedy follows the adventures of a mischievous and clumsy house spirit who befriends a young girl and the family that has moved into his home. Directed by Denis Chernov (*Kikoriki*), produced by Ilya Popov and written by Neil Landau (*Tad: The Explorer*, *Sheep & Wolves*). **Riki Group**



My Little Pony Movie (Untitled). Little has been revealed about this second *My Little Pony* movie, except that it's CG-animated.

Fans believe that the feature will be Generation 5, since the animated series is slated to air in 2020. Directed by Jayson Thiessen, the first movie was released in 2017 and made over \$60.3 million worldwide. **Allspark/Boulder Media/Paramount (Sept. 24)**

PAW Patrol: The Movie. Cal Brunker (*The Nut Job 2, Escape From Planet Earth*) is directing this big-screen adaptation of Nickelodeon's hugely popular animated preschool series, which was recently picked up for its eighth season. Mikros Image is handling the animation production. The pic will be produced by Jennifer Dodge. **Spin Master/Nickelodeon/Paramount (Aug.)**



Pinocchio. Fantasy and horror master Guillermo del Toro (*The Shape of Water, Trollhunters*) is helming this stop-motion adaptation of Carlo Collodi's 1883 novel, based on designs by illustrator Gris Grimly. Mark Gustafson (*Fantastic Mr. Fox*) is co-directing this darker fairy tale about the wooden boy's adventures. Script is penned by del Toro and Patrick McHale (*Over the Garden Wall, Adventure Time*). Voice cast includes Tilda Swinton, Ewan McGregor, Ron Perlman. **ShadowMachine/The Jim Henson Co./Netflix**

Raya and the Last Dragon. Directed by Paul Briggs and Dean Wellins, this Disney fantasy epic is set in a magical world where humans coexist with dragons and draws from Southeast Asian cultures and mythology. Written by Adele Lim (*Crazy Rich Asians*). With the voices of Cassie Steel and Awkwafina. **Walt Disney Animation Studios (March 12)**

Ron's Gone Wrong. Pixar Story veteran J.P. Vine (*Inside Out, The Good Dinosaur*) directs U.K.-based Locksmith Animation's first feature, which follows the adventures of a 12-year-old boy who ends up with a bot best friend who doesn't quite work like all the others. Locksmith co-founders Sarah Smith and Julie Lockhart are producing from a script penned by Smith and Peter Baynham. **Locksmith Animation/20th Century Studios (Feb. 26)**



Rumble. Directed by DreamWorks veteran Hamish Grieve (head of story

on *Rise of the Guardians, Captain Underpants*), this movie takes place in a world where monster wrestling is a global sport: Teenage Winnie seeks to follow in her dad's footsteps by coaching a lovable monster. Matt Lieberman (*Scoob!, The Addams Family*) penned the script, based on the graphic novel *Monster on the Hill*. Stars Will Arnett, Ben Schwartz, Geraldine Viswanathan, Terry Crews, Rebecca Quin, Tony Danza. **Reel FX/Paramount (Jan. 29)**

Sing 2. The musically gifted animals of Illumination's hit movie are back in this sequel which finds them leaving Moon Theater for the big city. Writer/director Garth Jennings returns along with voice stars Matthew McConaughey, Reese Witherspoon, Scarlett Johansson, Taron Egerton, Seth MacFarlane, John C. Reilly, Nick Kroll and Tori Kelly. **Illumination/Universal (Dec. 22)**

Space Jam 2. Malcolm D. Lee (*Night School, Girls Night Out*) directs this sequel to the popular 1996 live-action/animated sports comedy. The new outing features LeBron James, Don Cheadle, Sonequa Martin-Green, as well as Looney Tunes characters such as Bugs Bunny, Lola Bunny and others. James is also producing the movie with Ryan Coogler (*Creed, Black Panther*), who co-wrote the script with Sev Ohanian (*Fruitvale Station*). **Warner Animation Group/Springhill Ent. (July 16)**

Spirit Riding Free. Lucky Prescott's life is changed forever when she moves from her home in the city to a small frontier town and befriends a wild mustang named Spirit in this feature version of the popular animated series, developed by Aury Wallington. The movie is directed by DreamWorks veterans Elaine Bogan (*Trollhunters, 3Below, Dragons: Race to the Edge*) and Ennio Torresan (head of story on *Abominable, The Boss Baby, Turbo*). **DreamWorks Animation/Universal (May 14)**

Vivo. Sony Pictures Animation's first-ever musical adventure features dynamic original songs from Lin-Manuel Miranda and his writing partner Qjara Alegria Hudes, and takes audiences on a thrilling adventure from Cuba to the Florida Everglades and Miami. Directed by Kirk DeMicco and co-director Brandon Jeffords. **Sony Pictures Animation (April 16)**

Wendell & Wild. This highly original stop-motion movie centers on two demon brothers (Jordan Peele and Keegan-Michael Key) who face off against a nun and a pair of goth teens. Directed by stop-motion master Henry Selick (*Coraline, The Nightmare Before Christmas*) and produced by Selick, Peele and Ellen Goldsmith-Vein and co-produced by Sarah Serata (*Barbie Dreamtopia*). **Monkeypaw/Gotham Group/Artists First/Netflix**

2022

DC Super Pets. Superman's dog Krypto teams up with Streaky the flying cat to fight evil and stop crime when the Man of Steel is on vacation. The pic is directed by Jared Stern (*Green Eggs and Ham, The LEGO Batman Movie*), co-directed by Sam Levine (*Penn Zero: Part Time Hero*) and penned by Stern and John Whittington (*Green Eggs and Ham, The LEGO Batman Movie*). Fans hope Beppo the Super Monkey and Comet the Super Horse are also appearing in the pic. **Warner Bros. Animation/DC Entertainment (May 22)**

Nimona. Patrick Osborne (*Pearl, Big Hero 6*) directs this CG-animated adaptation of Noelle Stevenson's (*She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*) popular graphic novel about a young shapeshifter who teams up with a mad scientist to expose the ruler of the kingdom. **Blue Sky Studios/20th Century Studios (Jan. 14)**

Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse 2. This sequel to Sony's Oscar-winning and universally acclaimed feature will bring back Miles Morales and some of his other Spider-Verse friends for a new adventure, which will be directed by Joaquim Dos Santos (*Avatar: The Last Airbender, Voltron*) and penned by David Callaham (*The Expendables, Wonder Woman: 1984*). Chris Miller and Phil Lord are expected to be back creatively as well. **Marvel Ent./Sony Pictures Animation (April 8)**

The Tiger's Apprentice. This animated adaptation of Laurence Yep's popular book series centers on a young boy who becomes the magical apprentice of the tiger Mr. Hu and teams up with a band of mythological creatures based on the Chinese zodiac to protect an ancient phoenix egg from an evil group who wish to possess it. Pixar alum Carlos Baena makes his directorial debut, with a script by David Magee (*Life of Pi*) and Harry Cripps. Produced by Jane Startz, exec produced by Raman Hui (*Monster Hunt*) and Kane Lee. **Paramount Animation (Feb. 11) ♦**



2055 Purcell Way, North Vancouver BC CANADA

Building strong foundations and successful careers since 1995



2D Animation & Visual Development

3D Animation for Film & Games

Digital Visual Effects



www.capilanou.ca/smpa



www.gradshow.com



A Musical Tonic for Trying Times

Loren Bouchard and Josh Gad tell us a few things about *Central Park*, their wonderful new musical show on Apple TV+.

By Ramin Zahed

If you are seeking respite from the dire reality around us these days, relief arrives in late spring in the form of *Central Park*, a brilliant new musical on Apple TV+ from *Bob's Burger* creator Loren Bouchard, exec producer Nora Smith and actor-writer Josh Gad (*Frozen*). The exuberant show, which features the voices of Gad, Leslie Odom Jr., Tituss Burgess, Kristen Bell, Stanley Tucci, Daveed Diggs and Kathryn Hahn, follows the adventures of a family who lives in Central Park as the father is the park's caretaker.

The origins of the project go back a few years ago when Gad's agent set up a meeting for him with Bouchard, who was looking to expand his company's creative output beyond the world of *Bob's Burgers* (currently in its seventh successful season on FOX-TV). "Nobody's going to say no to meeting with Loren," Gad says during a recent phone interview. "So, I met with Loren and his writing partner Nora Smith, and pitched this

loose concept to him. Loren and Nora took this idea and infused this with their unique kind of magic, and that's how we ended up with the

Burgers, but I wanted our project to take audiences along on an emotional journey the same way they'd experience with any live musical

"I didn't want to make a show where people are rude and mean to each other. That is not worth putting out in the world. Fortunately, we were able to tell a story about a family that love each other and make it funny as well."

— Co-creator Loren Bouchard



concept for *Central Park*."

Gad says his plan was to create a truly original musical event, which meant coming up with an animated project that had the American musical theater genre in each and every frame. "Of course there have been many successful shows that have done musical numbers in some of their episodes, including *Bob's*

show, like *Hamilton* or *The Book of Mormon* or any other culture zeitgeist-y titles," he notes.

Four Songs Per Episode?

"That was a very scary prospect because it had never been done before," Gad continues. "We wanted to do three or four original numbers per episode, and that's beyond time-



Familiar Notes:
Kristen Bell voices Molly Tillerman, an imaginative young girl who lives with her family in Central Park. The show also stars Josh Gad, Leslie Odom Jr., Titus Burgess, Stanley Tucci, Daveed Diggs and Kathryn Hahn.

consuming. When I first insisted on that, there was a lot of pushback. But Loren understood how necessary it was to go all in if we were going to do this. He and the team, which includes [supervising producer] Janelle Momary, exec producer Nora Smith and show runners Sanjay Shah and Halsted Sullivan, have done an incredible job of creating something that is incredibly difficult to produce and deliver. Now that I have seen it fully executed, I believe it's a real gamechanger."

Bouchard says he loved Gad's notion of creating a musical centered on a family living in Central Park. "He definitely had my attention, and so we started having lunch and coffee dates and slowly grew the idea for the show," says the Emmy-winning producer and show creator. "The notion was that you have this family who lives in Central Park because he was the general manager of the park, and he lives there with his family, just like how the mayor lives in Gracie Mansion. This bending of reality gave us this fairy tale version, where they live in this faux castle in the middle of the park. We also added this narrator, in the spirit of the rooster in Disney's *Robin Hood*, and cast friends and associates of Josh's because we wanted to put people around him who he wanted to work with. He has this unique ability of making people say yes to things!"

Bouchard, who has been making wonderful animated shows since the days of *Dr. Katz, Professional Therapist* (1995-2002), *Home Movies* (1999-2004) and *Lucy, the Daughter of the Devil* (2005-2007), says he has new appreciation for the American musical comedy. "I really liked learning how to make a musical animated show," he says. "Anyone who grew up watching old Disney movies knows that animation and music can make a really powerful combination."

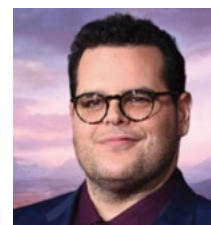
He says he also discovered how big a role music had to play in *Central Park*.

"I learned that a real musical has music at the core of it, and music is more important than any other aspects of the project," Bouchard says. "It moves the story forward as well as upping the emotional stakes of the story. When I agreed to do the show, I didn't fully understand this, but Josh, who is a real musical guy, knew everything. He had this idea to use a guest songwriter in every episode, except the pilot. That added a little bit of variety and a fresh

of composers that he could pick from for each episode. "That was always part of my pitch," he says. "We didn't want to have a similar sound and energy for the whole show. To have a guest artist per episode was my pie-in-the-sky idea. A year later, now that we are putting the final touches on the show, I can see that the songs are next level. Another goal was to not to treat any of the songs as jokes, which happens a lot in animation where the songs

"We wanted to embrace all the emotions you may experience from a great musical. That's not to say that we don't have hilarious songs on the show — we just take them seriously."

— Co-creator/actor Josh Gad



take on the composition each week. Our in-house people are fantastic, but I'd love that you have to see the end credits of the show to find out who the songwriter of the week happens to be. We reached out to some amazing people, and we were thrilled that they all said yes."

Pick Your Favorite Composers!

Gad says that he always envisioned a pool

serve as spoofs of musical tropes. Instead, we wanted to embrace all the emotions you may experience from a great musical. That's not to say that we don't have hilarious songs on the show — we just take them seriously."

Gad recalls that he was equally excited to play with concepts and get a writers' room together. "Loren is very detail oriented and we had a lot of changes along the way," he says.



A Patch of Green: Loren Bouchard, Nora Smith and Josh Gad's new series chronicles the battle between a greedy hotel heiress (voiced by Stanley Tucci) and a loving family who bands together to protect Central Park.



"We had a lot of stuff that we were changing down the road, and I thought it was so remarkable how game the animators were. There were certainly a lot of sleepless nights for everyone. We just finished locking the final episodes — there are 10 episodes in the first season [and Apple TV+ has already greenlit a second season]. Then, in addition to

all of that, we had to shut down in the middle of post because of the virus. Thanks to the amazing team at Bento Box, all these gifted animators were able to take the work home and work at slightly a slower pace, but everything came together pretty much on time."

The animation for the show is handled by the amazing team at Bento Box, based in Bur-

bank. To help out with the 2D animation, the production also uses Yeson Entertainment and Yearim Productions in Seoul, S. Korea; Tonic DNA in Montreal, Canada; and Mighty in Guadalajara, Mexico. Bouchard adds that the production wouldn't have been able to deliver everything in time without the aid of the supervising producer Janelle Momary, who figured out how everyone could work from home after the COVID-19 shutdowns. "Janelle really moved mountains to get everyone home and safe, and yet up and working. We should all sing her praises — and her amazing IT team."

Central Park shares a similar visual aesthetic with Bouchard's other popular show *Bob's Burgers*, so you can easily imagine the Belcher family running into the Tillermans, the main characters of the new show. While each episode is self-contained, there is a longer storyline involving the greedy heiress who plans to destroy the park, which will reward audiences who watch every episode. Apple TV+ will release the first three episodes together on May 29, but will then offer a new episode on a weekly basis.

Kindness and Heart

Both Gad and Bouchard are really excited to share their wonderful handiwork with the world at large in a few weeks. "The thing that Loren and I set out to do was to create a show that is pure joy in these times of cynicism and, obviously right now, much unmitigated concern, fear and dismay," says Gad. "We hope the show gives you a half-hour worth of smiles each week—a half-hour that people can forget their troubles. We also hope that the show is going to do a lot more than that, and also offer a lot of songs that you'll have a hard time getting out of your head."

Bouchard adds, "I didn't want to make a show where people are rude and mean to each other. That is not worth putting out in the world. Fortunately, we were able to tell a story about a family that love each other and make it funny as well. I love these characters and how they bounce off each other, and we also have a delicious villain, the old heiress voiced by Stanley Tucci! The irony is that you start falling in love with her, too. Of course, we hope we do some good for somebody out there with our show. I also love the show's big stakes, which is the possible destruction of a huge public place. This family could go on to save Central Park, and maybe the world, so the stakes couldn't be higher!" ♦

Central Park debuts on Apple TV+ on May 29.

STAY CONNECTED!



**We bring the best of the animation
and vfx community together!**

Nov. 1-4, 2020
The Garland Hotel
Los Angeles, California

Register now to get special early-bird rates
www.animationmagazine.net/summit

Wendevvous with That Wascally Wabbit (and Friends)

The long-anticipated new *Looney Tunes Cartoons* series arrives on HBO Max in May!

A year after taking Annecy Int'l Animated Film Festival by storm, the new *Looney Tunes Cartoons* series are finally ready to make a splash on the small screen. Executive produced by Peter Brownhardt (*Uncle Grandpa*, *Secret Mountain Fort Awesome*) and Warner Bros. Animation president Sam Register, the highly anticipated show will debut on HBO Max in May.

The new series includes two of the shorts that have already been released independently, the Bugs Bunny/Elmer Fudd episode, *Dynamite Dance*, and the *Mummy Dummy* outing featuring Porky Pig and Daffy Duck (a.k.a. *The Curse of the Monkey Bird*). Altogether, the season will include 80 11-minute episodes, each showcasing animated shorts that vary in length and include adapted storylines for today's audience. And yes, the package includes some fun holiday-themed specials as well. *Looney Tunes Cartoons* also features a fantastic team of voice actors, including Eric Bauza, Jeff Bergman and Bob Bergen.

"I am a huge fan of those early Chuck Jones, Bob Clampett and Friz Freleng shorts," says Brownhardt. "When I was in junior high, my brother took me to see a screening of classic Chuck Jones *Looney Tunes* shorts at the Museum of the Moving Image. He also appeared in person to promote his book *Chuck Amuck*. That experience changed my life forever. It was the first time I was seeing so many people watch these shorts together and laugh at all these great shorts. It was such an amazing communal experience."

Brownhardt, who names classics such as *Falling Hare*, *Hare Ribbin'*, *Buccaneer Bunny* and *Hair-Raising Hare* as some of his favorites, began to develop the idea to reboot the *Looney Tunes* characters with a deep reverence for their origins in the fall of 2017, and the series began production in 2018. The shorts go back to the roots of the characters.

"The characters' personalities were wacky, zany and high-energy," notes the director. "We wanted the shorts to be more surreal and cartoony. Our challenge was how to recreate the old style of animation and characters while



Bugs challenges Yosemite Sam, who first appeared in 1944, in the new series.

bringing that energy and aesthetic to 2020. That language and feel of cartoony animation is not so much around anymore. But that's how I fell in love with the medium. I used to watch those shorts on TNT and on my older brother's videotapes."

The Emmy-nominated director and his team of 50 work on the cartoons at the Warner Bros. Animation studio in Burbank, but they are also aided by four international studios (Tonic DNA in Montreal, Yowza! in Toronto, Yearim in Korea and Snipple in the Philippines). "It was a really global effort to create these classic cartoons," says Brownhardt. "We had people from all parts of the world working with these characters that are so timeless and well known. They all used a variety of methods – from old-fashioned pencil and paper, all the way to Toon Boom Harmony and Adobe software – to produce the animation."

The artists studied all of the classic designs of the characters as inspiration for each one of the shorts. "Every director had their own take on Bugs, Daffy and Porky," says Brownhardt. "We did a lot of drawing and decided to cherry pick from all the characters in time to land on our versions of the characters. We wanted the fluidity and energy. Our characters are more rounded, more squat. We gave Bugs yellow gloves, and Daffy has the longer, thinner bill. Porky is Clampett's version, with the bigger eyes and head. We definitely did a lot of homework!"

Brownhardt says he and his team have been thrilled by the positive response of fans at

screenings. "As much as I want to take credit, it all comes down not screwing up these beloved, universal characters. I like to say that we are standing on the shoulders of giants, hoping that we don't lose our balance and fall flat on our faces.

The people who made the original shorts invented this art form. They took the baton and ran with it. They learned on the job and had decades to perfect it. They are the Michelangelos of this artform. I just hope that our shorts will make people laugh. If I can get audiences to have that same communal experience that I had when I saw the *Looney Tunes* in the theater for the first time, that would be amazing."

The helmer says he and his team are very excited to share the fruits of their labor after so many years with fans this spring. "It's so rewarding to be able to share the hard work that so many amazing and talented folks have put into this series over the past two and a half years. I hope that the viewers laugh a lot and fall in love with these characters, just like I did when I was a kid." ♦

***Looney Tunes Cartoons* premieres on HBO Max in May.**



Peter Brownhardt

A Few Words from the Brilliant Mr. Bauza

Throughout his career, Eric Bauza has voiced so many remarkable animated characters, it would take several pages to list all his credits. The comedian and former animation artist, who has starred as Scrooge McDuck, the Beagle Boys, Baby Fozzie Bear, Luke Skywalker, Puss in Boots and Stimpy (to name a few), provides the voices of Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Marvin the Martian, Tweety and Pepé Le Pew in the new show. We caught up with him to get the skinny on his amazing career:



Can you tell us how you got the gig on the new *Looney Tunes* show?

Bauza: It was by way of an open casting call. The only other time I've ever had a chance to audition for these beloved characters was almost 10 years ago for *The Looney Tunes Show* when I landed the role as Marvin the Martian. It's pretty rare when WB recasts these characters, unless they are looking to do something drastically different. I felt that this time around they wanted to give them a fresh take.

What do you love about this new incarnation of Bugs, Daffy, Tweety and Marvin?

What I love the most about this run of *Looney Tunes* is that Sam [Register] and Pete [Brown-gardt] and the rest of the team went back to the drawing board ... literally. In all my years

as an actor and decades before as a fan, this is the closest to the original [*Looney Tunes*] I think we can get as far as design, animation, writing, background painting, voices and music. I'm very honored and proud to be a part of these animated shorts. The show is the ultimate love letter to the *Looney Tunes* forefathers. We didn't try to reinvent the wheel on this round, instead we paid homage to what Clampett, Jones, McKimson, Freleng and Avery created.

What was the toughest aspect of this latest gig?

The toughest part was knowing how accurate the look of the shorts was going to be, so as an actor the challenge is always the right acting of the characters. For me, these characters will always be Mel Blanc. No one can ever replace

the mountain of legendary work that he did. But the demand for new *Looney Tunes* shorts will always need to be met. It's always been a dream to step into these characters because they meant so much to me as a kid.

I never went to school for "acting." I started out in animation on the other side of the glass as a character layout artist — I learned everything about acting through watching cartoons, specifically *Looney Tunes*. Animation has always been in my blood. In a way, my contribution to *Looney Tunes Cartoons* is a small thank you to Mr. Blanc for teaching me everything I need to know about character acting.

How do you stay sane during these crazy quarantine times?

We certainly are living in crazy times, aren't we? I try to stay sane by calling my parents, and checking in with my brother and his family back home in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. I keep in contact with close friends and, above everything else, I take care of my son. And yes, he loves *Looney Tunes*, too! We watch the classics almost every day. Since we are on quarantine, as a voice actor I'm working from home. I have the same microphone I used to audition with from 2007. Still works. They say recording voices from home is the new normal, but hopefully for not too much longer. I miss people, LOL. P.S.: Wash Your Hands.

Best advice for those who want to get into the voice acting business?

It's acting, acting, acting. If you can do funny voices and impressions, that's great! But acting is *the* most important thing about your performance — especially in animation. We don't have the luxury of using facial expressions or body language to convey emotions. Everything that moves you from our performances in animations comes only from our vocal chords. Even if you're voicing an animated character, the character needs to be grounded in some kind of reality. Once you nail the acting, then the voice will follow. ♦





Light at the End of the Apocalypse

Pendleton Ward and Duncan Trussell shine a beam of optimism and humanity in their brilliant new animated series *The Midnight Gospel*.

If you like your apocalyptic fare flavored with sharp insights, beautiful imagery and psychedelic animation, then you should get comfortable and get ready to binge the complete first season of *The Midnight Gospel* at one go. The fantastic new show, created by *Adventure Time* wizard Pendleton Ward and actor/comedian Duncan Trussell, premieres on Netflix this month and is unlike anything else we might see this year.

Trussell, who started hosting his popular *Duncan Trussell Family Hour* podcast in 2012, says the genesis of the show goes back to the day he received a random email from Ward. "I couldn't believe it," says the comedian. "We were still in the early days of podcasting then, and I thought it was so amazing that he actually listened to my show. I was hoping I wasn't being pranked or trolled by a monster!"

Before long, Trussell and Ward became friends, and when *Adventure Time* wrapped its run on Cartoon Network, Ward approached the comedian to collaborate on a new animated show. "I wanted to make something ... meaningful, ha-ha!," says Ward. "But I was struggling to come up with a concept for a show that could showcase the things that I think are meaningful. I wanted something overly honest that dealt with kindness and compassion, something that felt beautiful to me."

Ward says he was listening to Trussell's podcast and realized that the host was doing all the things that he wished he was doing. "He interviews meditation teachers and Zen gurus, comedians and philosophers ... and in those conversations he's an open book," he notes. "He talks about his insecurities and flaws and he's sweet and uplifting as he listens with in-

tention to his guests ... and he's a comedian!"

Zen and the Art of Animation

Ward says Trussell has the ability to make two-hour conversations about meditation funny! "He makes listening to this stuff so enjoyable, so I asked him if I could make an animated show around his podcast interviews," says the animation creator. "I drew a rough animatic of how I imagined it, where he was interviewing Dr. Drew and they were both fighting zombies in an apocalyptic reality while they talked about curbing opioid addiction with weed. Duncan was into it and then

innately comedic situation. "I guess even during apocalyptic situations, people aren't going to be always talking about the apocalypse and not about interpersonal relations. So, even though our hero goes through all these different scenarios, the conversation grounds it while allowing it to exist in these beautiful, ethereal and psychedelic worlds."

According to Trussell, Ward came up with a proof of concept animatic for the show about two years ago, which eventually evolved into the pilot for the series. "At that point, we had both heard so many things about Netflix and the fact that they give a lot of creative free-

"I hope we made something that pulls people out of their heads so they can just be blobs for a bit. That's my favorite kind of show to watch: Somethin' that makes me smile and doesn't push me around too much, so I can relaaaaax into a blob!"

— Co-creator Pendleton Ward



we went about developing it more together and pitching it."

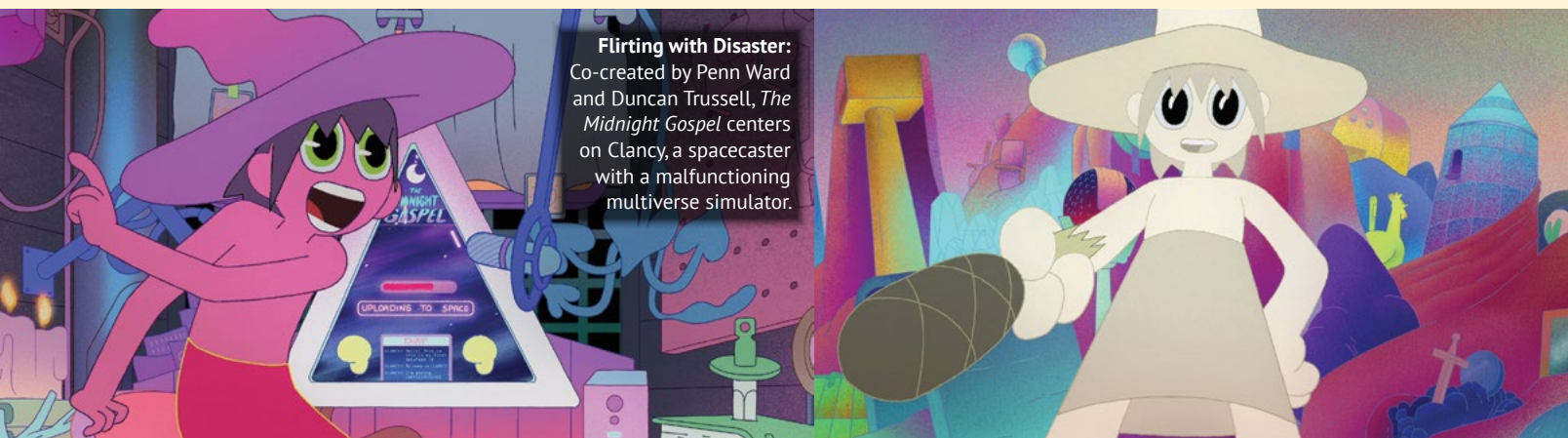
The show they came up with follows the adventures of a Clancy, slacker "spacecaster" who lives in another dimension called 'The Chromatic Ribbon,' where simulation farmers use powerful bio-computers to simulate universes to harvest technology. Meanwhile, all the planets within the simulator are going through their own unique apocalypses, and the beings living in these other worlds are the guests Clancy interviews for his spacecast, which is called *The Midnight Gospel*! Got it?

Trussell says Ward realized that if you take podcast dialog and put it against some intense Indiana Jones-type action, it creates an

dom to the artists and creatives, so we took our pitch and showed it to Mike Moon [head of adult animation] at Netflix and told them that we wanted to work with them."

Trussell says he and Ward were also very excited about working with Chris and Shannon Prynosi and their L.A.-based animation studio, Titmouse. "I had been to one of their Smash Parties [where employees were invited to smash things they brought from home] and thought they were so cool," he recalls. They have these great Bigfoot sculptures at the studio, it's just a wonderful madhouse of an animation studio, and I fell in love with it!"

After getting the greenlight, Ward and Trussell put together a writers' summit of sorts for



Flirting with Disaster: Co-created by Penn Ward and Duncan Trussell, *The Midnight Gospel* centers on Clancy, a spacecaster with a malfunctioning multiverse simulator.

two weeks, where they invited comedians like Johnny Pemberton, Brendon Walsh, Weird Al Yankovic and Emo Philips were joined by occult scholar Jason Louv and white witch Maja D'Aoust. "Those were the two most fun weeks ever," recalls Trussell. "The main idea was to come up with all these various ways that the world could end, since the show is all about a malfunctioning multiverse simulator, so we needed eight or more different apocalypses."

Ward's New Playground

For Ward, *The Midnight Gospel* was a chance to explore the brave, new world of making animation for grown-ups. "For the first half of the year, I felt kind of scared to make an adult cartoon — drawing blood and wieners and stuff," he confesses with a laugh. "I was so used to making kids' cartoons. I don't know ... I was like 'this feels wrong!' But then I got over it! My intention was to mix cartoony ultra-violence with conversations on compassion. I wanted to make something that calloused people could bite into and maybe get something out of it. That's what Duncan's podcast did for me. It has an edge that grounds me so I don't cringe up into a ball listening to pure sweetness. It's like putting honey on potato chips or dipping French fries in my frosty!"

Trussell says he was astounded by the contributions of all the board artists and animators who worked on the show. "Because of the nature of our show, our animators didn't have to adhere to such a strict style, as we wanted this dreamlike, psychedelic fluidity. Our animators and visual artists all contributed to the writing. Overall, so many people contributed to each episode ... I was a complete neophyte and so lucky to work with Pendleton and to be able to witness all of it from the beginning to the final episode of the season."

"Working at Titmouse was truly, really cool," adds Ward. "About 190 people worked on the show, and being near the animation was so wonderful for me. Our supervising director

Mike Mayfield was all about letting animators interpret the scenes and acting as they wanted. I wanted it to be animated on threes and fours 'cause I'm a nerd for limited animation. Mike asked the animators to stay loosely close to the designs, but to put their own style onto the drawings. I think all of that made it a fun show to animate since there was a lot of room for everyone to put their stink on it. The animation is killer, and I was blown away every time I watched a new cut with new animation in. Seeing how Titmouse worked and how Mike directed really made me want to make more shows where animators could have control."

The two-time Emmy winner (and six-time nominee) adds, "The show really came together so good. I am so happy: I honestly feel like I can die happy because the last episode is just so good. I stood up and screamed, 'Yeeeeee-aaaaa!!!' when I watched the first pass of the last animatic."

For Trussell, getting to work with Ward has also been a life-changing experience. "Creatively, it's one of the best things that has ever

ful ability to trim the fat, which you can say is a simplicity genius."

Trussell, who counts classic movies such as *Watership Down*, *Charlotte's Web* and *The Secret of N.I.M.H* and MTV's *Liquid Television* and *Aeon Flux* among his all-time animation favorites, says looking back he allows himself to pat himself on the back, because it's really a pat on the back of the hundreds of people who worked on the show. "I am proud of becoming one of the little synapses in the collective brain that formed *The Midnight Gospel*. We all became this creative goo, merged together and resulted in this amoeba of creativity. I am just proud to be part of that goo!"

Ward says he's especially fond of the last episode of the season. "Dang, I've watched it at least 50 times. I get something new from it every time I listen that changes my life. I got a lot out of working on this show ... It really made my life better. For everyone else, I hope we made something that pulls people out of their heads so they can just be blobs for a bit. That's my favorite kind of show to watch: Somethin' that

"You can meet whatever particular end of the world you are going through with an open heart."

— Co-creator Duncan Trussell



happened to me. I have so many ways to describe him, but I don't want to embarrass him, because he never likes to toot his own horn. But I really felt like someone who was living in a village in this fantasy world, and then one day, this forest wizard came out and said, 'You come with me!' and took me under his wing. He really downloaded so many things that he had learned during the years working on *Adventure Time*. He is such an empowering figure: He taught me to trust my own instincts and dive into the unknown, to even sing songs for the show! The amount of freedom he gives people who work with him is amazing. He also has this incredibly beautiful and power-

makes me smile and doesn't push me around too much, so I can relaaaaax into a blob!"

"'Gospel' means good news, and I was hoping that we convey the message that even through the most catastrophic situations, when everything is falling apart, there is opportunity to grow as a person," concludes Trussell. "You can meet whatever particular end of the world you are going through with an open heart. That there's this tiny little beam of light shining through the darkness of living through an apocalypse." ♦

***The Midnight Gospel* premieres on Netflix on April 20. (Yup, that's 4/20!)**



Extra Wild Extra-Terrestrials

Co-creators Justin Roiland and Mike McMahan offer some insights into the making of their twisted, hilarious new Hulu show *Solar Opposites*.

Misfit aliens from space trying to adapt to life on Earth have been a popular staple of sitcoms such as *My Favorite Martian*, *ALF* and *3rd Rock from the Sun*. This spring, a new brood of aliens make their impressive debut in Hulu's *Solar Opposites*, the hilarious new animated offering from *Rick and Morty* co-creator Justin Roiland and former head writer Mike McMahan (*Star Trek: Lower Decks*).

The series, which overflows with the inspired lunacy you might expect from the madmen who gave us *Rick and Morty*, follows a team of four aliens who have crash-landed into suburbia after escaping their exploding home planet. Two of them, Korvo (Roiland) and Yumyulack (Sean Giambrone) believe their new home is awful and polluted, while the other duo Terry (Thomas Middleditch) and Jesse (Mary Mack) love humans, their junk food and pop culture.

Roiland, who won an Emmy in 2018 for executive producing *Rick and Morty* (and yes, he also voices both Rick and Morty for that hugely popular show) tells us that he had the idea to

center a show on a pair of odd-couple aliens about 14 years ago. "At some point, it was going to be a live-action series, but it never happened," he recalls. "Mike McMahan and I were trying to develop another show, between the second and third season of *Rick and Morty*, but everything we did felt really laborious. So, we decided to put that other idea down and try the odd-couple alien pitch again ... and then, once we went back to the original premise, everything became very easy."

Loving the Aliens

"Justin has all these books of random sketches and ideas from years past," says McMahan. "We flipped through them and landed on a rough drawing of Terry and Korvo, which

we used as the inspiration to build out the family. I was a new dad at the time, so I added the kids/replicants and the baby/Pupa character, we were going for a classic sitcom/FOX look from afar, which would get weirder the closer you looked. The tone we wanted to hit was 'funny and fun over everything else at all times,' which you can still clearly see in the finished show."

McMahan and Roiland then put together the story for the pilot, which is very close to the final version that viewers will get to see on Hulu this month. "We originally had interest from Netflix and Syfy, but those didn't happen, and then Hulu stepped in," says Roiland. "We then added [exec producer/writer] Josh Bycel (*American Dad!*, *Happy Endings*) along,

'It's funny to think about humanity from the perspective of alien beings. We are going to have lots of fun with the gooblers, but I can't tell you more about it because we don't want to ruin the joke.'

— Co-creator Justin Roiland



and things really got moving. It was a lot of work, but everyone is really kicking ass -- and it's been a lot of fun, too."

In addition to the show regulars, the series also boasts a phenomenal list of guest voice actors. The first season alone features the likes of Alan Tudyk, Tiffany Hadish, Tom Kenny, Alfred Molina, Christina Hendricks, Rainn Wilson, Eric Bauza, Amanda Leighton, Maurice LaMarche, Miguel Sandoval, Nat Faxon, Natalie Morales, Phil LaMarr and Kari Wahlgren. The show is produced by 20th Century Fox Television and the animation is handled by Green Portal Productions and Vancouver-based Bardel Entertainment, which also handle *Rick and Morty*.

Roiland says he and McMahan had a great time brainstorming about the aliens, their weird biology and how they interact with the world in unexpected ways. For example, whenever they get stressed, their bodies begin to emit little creatures that look like a hybrid between a giant virus and a pink booger (they're called *gooblers*).

"It's funny to think about humanity from the perspective of alien beings," says Roiland.

"We are going to have lots of fun with the gooblers, but I can't tell you more about it because we don't want to ruin the joke."

Overall, both Roiland and McMahan say the show is a bit sillier and looser than their other collaboration, *Rick and Morty*. "Our process of writing and producing is quicker, but we still strive for the same level of humor and surprises. We have so many ideas about how these aliens survive on the planet. But when you think about it, it's really an immigrant story," Roiland points out. "These characters are very new to their environment, and we get to have fun by looking at things we take for granted and build jokes and sketch storylines around those ideas."

McMahan says one of their biggest challenges was to always keep the comedy and the tone of the show as light and fun as possible, even when pouring their efforts into making sure everything was professionally executed. "It's easy for a show to become 'right,' but also lose the frivolity that made you like it in the first place. *Solar Opposites* is always a balancing act between, 'we have to make a really good, emotionally solid TV episode' and 'let's do some crazy, effed shit that makes us laugh. I'm really happy with how the first season ended up in that regard.'"

Juggling Toons

Looking back at the past few years, Roiland says the big challenge was juggling the pro-

duction of *Solar Opposites*, all of his *Rick and Morty* duties and launching his own gaming studio Squanch Games in 2016. "Everything was happening at the same time," he says. "But luckily I had an amazing team. Mike and Josh were amazing and did a great job of running the room day to day. It's the old adage: You have to surround yourself with talented people and get out of their way. We are having so much fun with this show and our voice cast bring so much to the table: They truly embody the characters and add some hilarious improv

actly what I wanted it to be from conception through execution, which is a rare treat for a creator. Also, the art team and the voice actors are insanely talented, everyone gave it their best, and you'll see that the first season is something special."

Roiland says he hopes the audience will get some entertainment and some happiness by watching his new show. "Things are pretty sad out there in the real world, so we hope *Solar Opposites* and new episodes of *Rick and Morty* will offer people a little bit of distraction."

Close Encounters of the Awkward Kind: Roiland and McMahan have a lot of fun with their alien family of misfits in the new Hulu series *Solar Opposites*.



"Somehow, this show feels like a classic, broad network sitcom and like an insane cable show that fell out of another dimension, all at the same time."

— Co-creator Mike McMahan



material to the show, as well."

Roiland, who says he was hugely influenced by shows such as *The Simpsons*, *Beavis and Butt-head*, *Ren & Stimpy* and *Liquid Television* when he was younger, says fans could see a possible appearance by Rick and Morty on *Solar Opposites* in the future. "In an infinite multiverse, everything is part of the multiverse, so they could easily be a couple of realities away," he says. "I have no idea how you would navigate the IP waters, but that would be really friggin' cool!"

"Our initial pitch to Hulu always included a heavily serialized element, so there's a

big part of the show that's always been designed to be binged," adds McMahan. "I've never worked on a serialized animated comedy, and I don't see a lot of them, so I heavily nerded out that we got to make a serialized show along with a goofball comedy. What you see on the screen (in that respect) is ex-

"I hope audiences will sit down to watch a show about crazy funny aliens, and then be surprised as they keep watching how serialized and thought-out everything is," adds McMahan. "In any other time, this show couldn't exist. To me, the only reason a show should exist on Hulu (or any streamer) is because it feels like a miracle, like you can't believe what you're watching. Sometimes that feeling comes from a cancelled show being resurrected. For *Solar*, it's the jokes, language, what we can show on screen (*Solar* is TV-MA, which is crazy what you can do) and the serialized elements. Somehow, this show feels like a classic, broad network sitcom and like an insane cable show that fell out of another dimension, all at the same time." ♦

***Solar Opposites* (eight episodes) premieres on Hulu on May 8. Work has already begun on the second season for the series.**



Happy Endings of the Twisted Kind

JJ Villard tells us everything we needed to know about his insane new *Fairy Tales* show on Adult Swim.

JJ Villard has been making wild and idiosyncratic animation since he burst onto the scene with his award-winning shorts *Son of Satan* (2003) and *Chestnuts Icelolly* (2004). After receiving an Emmy for 2013 Adult Swim series, *King Star King* (2013), the L.A.-based toonster is back this year with **JJ Villard's *Fairy Tales***, a wild and twisted take on classic Grimm Brothers stories like Cinderella and Snow White. We caught up with JJ on a wild Friday morning just as everything was about to shut down in Los Angeles due to the COVID-19 pandemic:



Alright, JJ, maybe you can tell us about the origins of your *Fairy Tales*?

JJ Villard: I always say If you are able to get your foot in the door just a tiny bit, you've got to kick that door down in the name of Satan. And that's what I did. I got through the door of

Adult Swim. Anyway, Mike Lazzo [Adult Swim's exec producer at the time] came to the Cartoon Network studio in L.A. from Atlanta to talk about my previous show *King Star King* for a meeting, and I managed to give him this zine of my sketchbook.

Meanwhile, the other executive in the room (which shall remain nameless) said, "Why are you doing this? Mike Lazzo is a busy guy! He doesn't want to see your stupid sketchbook!" Little did the other exec know that years later, Mike Lazzo would remember that sketchbook and a specific page where I had drawn Snow White with a rabbit and a *Voltron* character. He thought that was insane, so he associated me with fairy tales because of that. So years later he came back to me and said, "I want you to do a show about fairy tales, based on that sketchbook page." Of course, I said, "Fine, I'll friggin' do a show on scary fairy tales." I was in development for less than a year, and I can't believe how fast it moved. We started making the show in December of 2018. That's when I got my first employee, our layout artist Matt Taylor.

Now, how many people worked on the show and where was the animation done?

I would say about 70 people overall, includ-

ing the animators at Saerom Animation studios in Korea — they are the same people who do *Dora the Explorer* [as well as *Amphibia*, *We Bare Bears*, *Craig of the Creek* and many others]. That's what sold the studio to me.

So what was it like to be in development for this crazy show?

When you're in development, it's very tough. Even if you have a full-time job, you can work on your new project late at night, or you can say, "F this fulltime job. I am committing to this new TV show." My philosophy was, nobody is going to care about the effort, everyone is going to care about the results. So I just committed myself really hardcore to the show. Dude, I said to myself, if I make these storyboards so insanely good, maybe I can skip the animation process for the pilot. That's what I did. I friggin' did 2,000 storyboards for an 11-minute show. Shipping takes almost six months, so that would have been another six months of hard living. So, I wanted to cut through that, and I storyboarded the hell out of it so the animators could really understand how the characters move.

The best thing to do is provide tons of reference for the animation studio. It's hard work to find all that reference work. The style of

animation we have on this show is friggin' weird. Those walk cycles are not normal walk cycles, so explaining that to an animation studio was not easy.

Can you tell us a little bit about the visual look of the show?

The show's aesthetic was inspired by fairy tales, so I looked at those Little Golden Books. I wanted to come up with something that was timeless. I slipped in a little Mary Blair, I mean her style is so charming and cute — something I would never do, but I said f--- it, I'm gonna slip in Mary Blair. People are going to say, "Hey, what happened to the *King Star King* look?" I am gonna do a children's storybook look, but the stories are going to be friggin' weird. The key is going to be simplicity, simplicity, simplicity.

Did you ever get in trouble for being too wild and crazy for Adult Swim?

Of course, there were restrictions at Adult Swim. I got into a lot of trouble for how sexual and perverted *King Star King* was ... but it was funny. In this cartoon, there are no sex jokes. I deserve a pat on my back for that. Sure, there are some gross-out jokes, but that really pushed the writers' room — which was just me and Johnny Ryan and James Merrill. My writers understand my sense of humor and I understand theirs. We laugh at the same type of shit. Picking the right writer is so important for the show.

What would you say was the toughest part of getting the show off the ground?

I guess the toughest part, as with many projects, was I am a new creator here at Cartoon Network, and every creator has their own method and way of working, so it's difficult for people to understand how different creators work. That's all I can say about that. I am a workaholic — I get here at 8:30 every day and I don't leave until 9 or 10. That's a life of a



Goldilocks Goes Mental: Series creator JJ Villard says he was inspired by famed Disney artist Mary Blair as well as his own twisted versions of Grimm fairy tales.

creator. You have to be very disciplined. This is a friggin' train with no brakes and it just keeps going. The train is on fire, too, and there are passengers in the back, so you can't mess up your due dates ... you can't F up the schedule. I am proud that I came in under budget. There were no recurring characters in the series, and each episode had its own stories.

Which animation tools did you use?

It's all traditionally animated. Pencil and paper, no shit. Saerom is old school. They are so old school, they don't even remember how old "old school" is. I boarded every episode. I did the character designs for the episode with Matt Taylor. You are pretty much your own animation director and you have to approve all the animation and the art. You have to wear a lot of hats. Because their budgets are a lot lower than the Cartoon Network shows ... You pretty much work seven days a week.

We need to talk about the awesome cast: You have a crazy list of horror movie stars, B-movie legends, a really eclectic mix that includes Linda Blair, Corey Feldman, Jennifer Tilly, Peter Weller, Warwick Davis, Catherine Hicks and David Patrick Kelly. How the heck did you get them all signed up?

Everything you do has to do with your work

ethic. I wrote this on my wall: A dream written down becomes a goal. A goal broken down to steps becomes a plan. And a plan backed by action makes your dream come true. I have always been about supporting professional cartoon voice actors and wanted to support the animation industry. But that wasn't getting me work. So, I thought, OK, I am going to work with celebrities that I want to work with: I don't want to work with friggin' Christina Aguilera or Billie Eilish or friggin' Tyler, the Creator.

My favorite movie of all time is *The Exorcist*. I decided to call up Linda Blair. She said the only way she was going to accept it was to interview the show creator, so she interviewed me! She didn't let me audition her. She called me up. I was fucking nervous, dude. She straight up asked, "Why do you want to work with me?" and I said, "Because to me, you are the greatest living female actress." And I meant that with every fiber in my body. She said "You brought a tear to my eye." She was so good that I hired her for two of the episodes. She is so natural. I have never seen anything like her. Peter Weller said, "Don't you ever tell me how to read my lines!" I said, "Dude you're Robocop. You can do whatever you want." The whole thing blew my mind. I didn't have one bad experience.

What is your take on the crazy, busy state of animation today?

My advice is to never reply when you are angry when all these people are headhunting you. Never make a promise when you're happy, and never make a decision when you're sad. If you can take any emails and phone calls with those three things in mind, you'll be fine.

The state of animation has never been better. All these streaming services don't know what they want. They haven't landed their big hit yet. There is still no *South Park* or *The Simpsons*. So they are searching. I am a victim of these streaming wars. I am a little tunnel rat digging my hole, checking out the scene trying to figure out the best path. But in the end, I'm gonna be Cobra Commander, dude, and take over the world, and nothing else! [Laughs] Lastly, there are too many artists out there. It gets filtered out. ♦

JJ Villard's *Fairy Tales* premieres on Adult Swim at 12:15 a.m. on May 10.



Make It So ... Great!

The new spinoff series *Star Trek: Picard* relied on the expertise of VFX supe Jason Zimmerman and his team for some stunning sci-fi visuals.

By Trevor Hogg

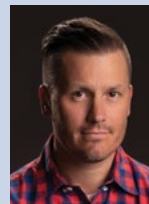
They say an actor is lucky to have one iconic role in their career, but Sir Patrick Stewart has at least two with his portrayal of Prof. Charles Xavier in the *X-Men* franchise and Captain Jean-Luc Picard from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. The latter returned to the small screen in the well-received new spinoff *Star Trek: Picard*, which debuted on CBS All Access in the first quarter of the year. In the first season of the show, Picard's quiet life on a French vineyard is interrupted by the arrival of a mysterious girl named Dahj Asha (Isa Briones), who is hunted by a secret Romulan organization and seeks his protection. Created by Kirsten Beyer, Michael Chabon, Akiva Goldsman and Alex Kurtzman, the new show relied on the expertise of Jason Zimmerman, the visual effects supervisor responsible for seasons one and two of *Star Trek: Discovery*.

"You learn every step of the way and take lessons from everything you can so you're improving and getting better," says Zimmerman. "The *Star Trek* canon provides guidelines, which is nice

but also daunting when you have expectations of the franchise and fans, and beloved characters and starships. There is no shortage of reference from the *Star Trek* universe. At the same time, the challenge is to make sure that you're doing it justice. I'm standing on the shoulders of previous visual effects supervisors and looking at how we continue to service the story and push it forward."

"We definitely took lessons from *Star Trek: Discovery* 1 and 2 and went into *Star Trek: Picard* with an eye to, how can we do things better?."

— VFX supervisor Jason Zimmerman



Initially, the VFX supervisor had several enlightening meetings with the show creators during preproduction to fully understand their vision. He recalls, "It was great being able to reach out to Kirsten Beyer for reference points, as she has a wealth of information about *Star Trek* canon. They wrote scripts and we would sit down and start the prep process. We had a lot of conversations about intent and what they wanted

things to look like."

Extensive world building was required for the eight episodes, amounting to 2,500 to 3,000 visual effects shots produced by Crafty Apes, DNEG, Ghost VFX, Filmworks FX and Pixomondo. "A big challenge was setting up the look, establishing the visual language, how is it separated from *Star Trek: Discovery* and other shows, and how do

these shots fit into the storyline and represent themselves in the final edits," remarks Zimmerman. "Throughout the season we've continued to refine the Borg cube [a starship used by the Borg Collective that is a formidable weapon]. Just having something of that scope and scale, and being able to show that in a way which is represented on the frame and helps to tell the story."

Zimmerman points out that when it comes to depicting space, if you don't have some proper geography to orientate yourself, then you may get lost. "It's such a unique design," he adds. "I went back and looked at as many shots in the past and

some of that were models and miniatures. What you can't draw from the shots is that they're actual things with real surfaces, structures and textures. Now with CG, we have the ability to create additional detail and literally every single aspect of something like that to make it look like a real thing and feel photographic."

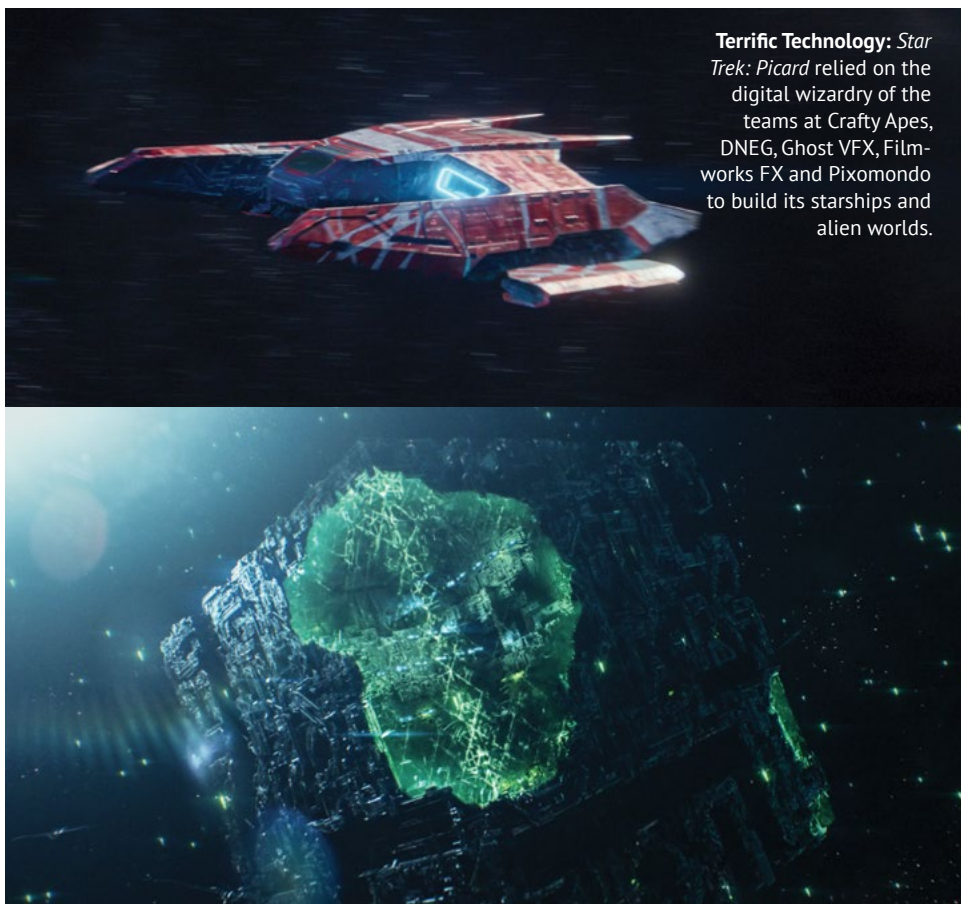
Among the environments showcased in the first season are Starfleet headquarters, Mars' Utopia Planitia shipyards and the French vineyard that Picard calls home. "When shooting a practical location that could be recognizable, you change things so that the viewer is focused on the story point rather than saying, 'That's the XYZ building,'" says Zimmerman. "We never got into a situation where we had to replace everything. It's always, what are we adding to or putting in the distance to make it feel denser or a futuristic city, like sky traffic or futuristic buildings. Any time with visual effects that you can ground shots with something practical in the frame it helps in terms of lighting and integration."

As expected, the project required various digital set extensions. "When you're extending the Borg cube interior, that thing is so massive in order to show scope and scale you need a bluescreen," he explains. "In the La Sirena starship there were windows upfront that also required bluescreen. There was a desire to have an on-planet feel which lends itself to different practical locations."

Masterful Shipbuilding

Starships were entirely CG, such as the La Sirena, a Kaplan F17 Speed Freighter owned and piloted by former Starfleet Captain Cristóbal Rios (Santiago Cabrera) which Picard hires to find cybernetics researcher Bruce Maddox and Dr. Soji Asha [the twin sister of Dahj]. "Depending on the size, scale and intent of the ship it should behave differently in terms of movability, how it flies and its purpose," explains Zimmerman. "Working with these ships is different in that we don't have the scope of the Federation *Star Trek: Discovery* has. Those ships are like battleships and require a great deal of energy to change direction. But when you get into a smaller or mid-level ship, like the La Sirena, it is more maneuverable. Part of the learning curve is asking, 'How does the ship behave? What can it do or not do? At what point does what you're animating start to look incorrect?' We do go through a lot of animation tests and previs to get a sense of whether it's going too fast or not fast enough. Does it feel too small and light based on how we're animating it? Do we need to slow it down to give it more weight and heft?"

Lead creature designer Neville Page (*Falling Skies*) and dept. head of prosthetics and special



Terrific Technology: *Star Trek: Picard* relied on the digital wizardry of the teams at Crafty Apes, DNEG, Ghost VFX, Filmworks FX and Pixomondo to build its starships and alien worlds.

makeup effects James MacKinnon (*American Horror Story*) transformed Dominic Burgess into the reptilian Mr. Vup, an alien species known as a Beta Annari which makes its debut in *Star Trek: Picard*. "Neville and James are so good at what they do and were able to create something that was camera ready," remarks Zimmerman. "Sometimes we'll add finishing touches like giving a bit of life to the little flap on the side of the face of Mr. Vup. Fortunately for us, we didn't have to venture too much into that other than adding animation when needed."

Zimmerman also points out that when required, lens flares and aberrations were also incorporated into the virtual camera photography. "The CG was treated as if it had been shot by a DP," states Zimmerman. "We took inspiration from the cinematography of Philip Lanyon [*Frontier*] and Darran Tiernan [*Westworld*] because they set the tone and our visual effects look better if we're able to integrate into their lighting." Some liberties had to be taken with deep space in order to make the imagery readable. "I've watched every possible movie that I could find as well as NASA feeds to see how the light in space looks and varies from what you experience down on a planet or even on a stage. Something that lights the Earth from space, like the sun, is going to create a different quality of shadows and light than a light placed a couple hundred feet above you."

"Depending where you are in the *Star Trek*

timeline there are different technologies that are at play," notes Zimmerman. "Warp speed and teleportation are things that have been established in many of the iterations of the show, but for a new show you try to produce something that has a different rift and is informed by the story and the technology of the time."

Holograms are also an integral part of the futuristic technology employed in the show. As Zimmerman points out, "The use of the holograms was something that was decided early on by the executive producers. The La Sirena is almost entirely operated by them. It's a question of making sure that the lighting is correct and having subtle things like a button press or the pulling back on a throttle line up with the actions of the actors."

Zimmerman, who received an Emmy nomination for his work on *Star Trek: Discovery*, continues to look at ways to enhance the television and movie franchise established by Gene Roddenberry. "We definitely took lessons from *Star Trek: Discovery* 1 and 2 and went into *Star Trek: Picard* with an eye to, how can we do things better? It has been a blast to work on *Star Trek: Picard* and be involved with the world building of a new iteration of a *Star Trek* show." ♦

You can watch the entire 10-episode first season of *Star Trek: Picard* on CBS All Access and Amazon Prime Video.

Tales of a Middle School Gumshoe

By Charles Solomon

Rampo Kitan: Game of Laplace

[Funimation: Two discs, Blu-ray; \$22.98]

Tarō Hirai (1894-1965), who wrote under the pen name Edogawa Ranpo (a transliteration of the Japanese pronunciation of Edgar Allan Poe) played a key role in the development of Japanese crime fiction. In Japan, his work is still widely read, and its influence extends beyond detective fiction to anime and manga. Ace detective Jimmy Kudo takes the pseudonym of Conan Edogawa in the long-running series *Case Closed*. The intricate battle of wits between teenage vigilante Light Yagami and the brilliant detective L in *Death Note* owes a debt to Ranpo's stories.

Rampo Kitan: Game of Laplace (*Strange Tales of Rampo: Game of Laplace*) was animated at the Lerche studio in 2015 to mark the 50th anniversary of the author's death.

Many of Ranpo's short stories feature Akechi Kogoro, the leader of The Boy Detectives Club. Kogoro (Eric Vale) appears in *Game of Laplace* as a 17-year old who has a special detective license from the government that allows him to skip class and access police records. He lives alone on top of an old office building; digs he shares with a huge jukebox so antiquated that it still plays 45 rpm singles.

But Kogoro is eclipsed by Yoshio Kobayashi (Jill Harris), an androgynous middle school boy. (The girls in his class complain that he's cuter than they are.) This cheerful adolescent wants to be a detective. When he gets involved in the investigation of the grisly murder of his homeroom teacher, Kobayashi declares nothing has ever made him feel so alive. He becomes Kogoro's assistant, and soon earns the equivalent of a learner's permit for a license like Kogoro's.

Conan Doyle Influence

In addition to Poe, Hirai was influenced by the Sherlock Holmes stories of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Those influences are easy to recognize in the ways Kogoro and Kobayashi analyze clues and formulate hypotheses.

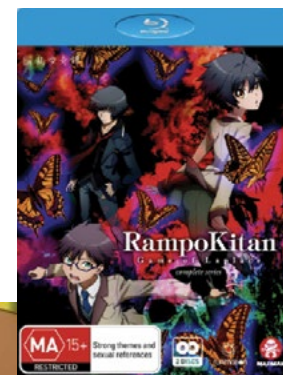
Seeing Kobayashi put himself at risk in criminal investigations horrifies his nervous best friend, Soji Hashiba (Justin Briner), the scion of a wealthy and prominent family. As class representative in the student council, he has the awkward duty of trying to explain Kobayashi's odd behavior. But friendships are sacred in anime: Hashiba finds himself helping Kobayashi, despite his better judgment. Although he complains constantly, he plants the prop that helps trap a murder suspect and generally supports his pal's newly discovered métier. Like Kogoro, Kobayashi and Hashiba appear in Ranpo's 'Boy Detectives' mystery stories, but in very different forms.

Ranpo was known for what were termed *ero-guro* stories, an elision of "erotic-grotesque," and screenwriter Makoto Uezu preserves more of those elements than American

disturbing turn when it's revealed the teacher was killed by a jealous girl because he was becoming too smitten with Kobayashi.

In "Twenty Faces," Kobayashi and Kogoro track down a vigilante killer who murders criminals who have escaped punishment by exploiting loopholes in the justice system. It's easier to imagine this story as a Clint Eastwood movie than an animated adventure.

The often creepy *ero-guro* elements might seem more palatable if the filmmakers hadn't shifted Ranpo's stories to middle school. There's a long tradition of teenage detectives, but Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys were at least high school students, and they didn't solve murders.



Several of the 11 episodes in *Rampo Kitan* are more interesting for their visuals than the storytelling. Director Seiji Kishi's artists do an effective job of creating an atmosphere that might be called "middle school noir." Background characters are reduced to featureless, shadowy shapes; they only become recognizable people when they speak to the main characters. The backgrounds are rendered in a subdued palette of reds and grays that suggests Kobayashi and Hashiba attend



viewers are used to in animation. The two-part opening murder mystery "The Human Chair" takes its name from the homeroom teacher's bizarre practice of murdering people and turning their body parts into furniture. The already-chilling tale takes an even more

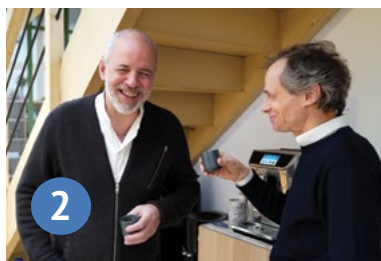
classes in the House of Usher.

Rampo Kitan is not a great anime series, but it is an interesting one. And it may lead American audiences to discover the influential fiction of Edogawa Ranpo, which is readily available in English. ♦

A couple of months ago, before the coronavirus pandemic changed everything, **Marc du Pontavice** and his team at Paris-based studio **Xilam** offered us a peek at their daily lives. Of course, things have changed drastically for Oscar-nominated producer Marc (*I Lost My Body*) and the rest of the world. But it's nice to look back at how we used to conduct our days back before this tiny but powerful organism changed our lives forever.



Marc arrives at Xilam HQ and is soon greeted by his friend – Oggy!



The post-Oscars jet lag strikes but luckily Xilam's HR Director 'FX' (François-Xavier De Maistre) is on hand to provide a much needed caffeine boost.



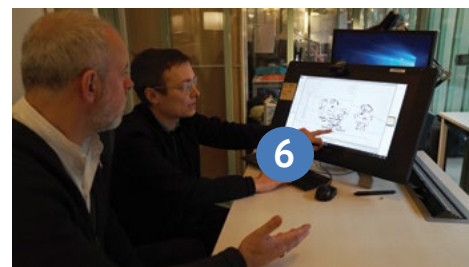
Marc's day starts by going through the newspapers and his emails, as well as plotting his next multi award-winning project...



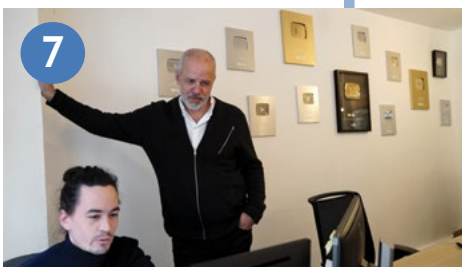
Marc and his assistant Virginie go through his agenda for the day ahead.



Brainstorming with Xilam's COO Dorothee Lanchier and her team, François Bardoux and Claire Darras.



Checking in the with talented Fred Martin – the supervising director on Xilam's first-ever CGI project *Oggy Oggy*.



Marc pops by the young digital team to say hi ... and to admire the wall of shiny YouTube Play Buttons!



A catch-up with Morgann Favennec (EVP, Distribution) to discuss all things international – where will Oggy, Zig & Sharko, Moka and Mr Magoo travel to next?!



An exciting way to finish off the day – Marc talks about the Oscar-nominated *I Lost My Body* during a panel organised by UniFrance and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science.

Never Miss an Issue!



Your daily source of top animation & VFX-related news, profiles and inspiration.

www.animationmagazine.net

fyc |  tv+

CENTRAL PARK



fyc |  tv+

CENTRAL PARK

